

# Fostering the Teaching of English Language in Nigeria Primary Schools: the Need for Teachers' Continuous Professional Development and Training

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## ABSTRACT

This article highlights how English language teachers professional development and training programmes fosters teachers' professional competences in the teaching of the subject. English Language is vital in developing communication and social skills in learners as it does empower learners to compete favorably with their peers around the world. The ex-post factor approach of the survey design was adopted in the study. A random sampling technique was used to select twenty primary schools in Oyo state, Nigeria, with 168 English teachers who were currently undergoing the SUBEB/UBEC teacher professional development programme (2018). Two instruments: Teacher Teaching Competence Scale (TTCS) with Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.68 and the Teachers Checklist Observation Scale (TCOS) with Scott Pi reliability coefficient of 0.71 were used for data collection. The data collection lasted for a period of fourteen weeks. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation at 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that teacher' attendance and exposure to a professional development and training programme; does enhance their professional teaching competences. It is therefore expedient that stakeholders in the education sector; especially governmental agencies, sponsor and encourage practicing primary teachers in attending and participating in professional development programmes; incentives should also be given to these teachers. This will go a long way at ensuring that these teachers look forward to attending such programmes at any time in the future.

**Keywords:** English Language, English Teachers, Professional Development and Training, Professional Competence in Teaching.

## Introduction

"English" as a language was derived from the word "*Anglisc*", which means the language of Angles and is acclaimed to have been invented by a Germanic tribe in England in the fifth century. It is the primary language of many nations such as New Zealand, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom (and many of its previous colonies) and the United States. It is the second language in a number of multilingual countries, such as Singapore, India and the Philippines. It is the official language in several African countries as well, such as Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and South Africa; to mention but a few, but is spoken worldwide in more than one hundred countries. It is learned around the world by learners as a foreign language and is often the tie between people of diverse nationalities when they meet while traveling, doing business, or in other contexts (Richard, 2020). A third of the world's population (over two billion persons) speaks English as a first or secondary language, and the language has been spread and influenced globally over time by culture, music, movies, advertising, and TV shows of the British and the Americans. It is projected that one out of four people globally, speak English with some degree of competence. This is the very reason why the language should be taught from the basic learner level: the primary school.

The rationale for studying English Language as a major subject at the primary level of Education may include the following: it is a universal language for communication; It is a means by which obtain and advance knowledge; it imparts the right and timely attitude and skills in pupils, necessary for their overall adaption and interactions with others and the world; initiating and sustaining meaningful relationships with people; for expansion of pupils' understanding and knowledge in the worlds' cultural diversity. More so, the English language plays a fundamental role in equipping learners with the skills and experiences needed for a lifelong learning, problem-solving, creativity, creative thinking and innovation and for adapting to the rapid changes and demands of the society. it opens up the world of freedom and fun-packed activities for learners. It does provide new possibilities in learners' social and intellectual development, career advancement, educational attainment, cultural understanding and personal fulfillment.

Education is a never-ending process-it is lifelong. Teachers through a continuing education programme (professional development), are given the opportunity of improving themselves in teaching skills and become adept in the profession. For pupils' to record good performances in their academic endeavours, all education stakeholders must ensure that teachers are allowed to attend and participate in a professional development/training programmes overtime so as to be abreast with current teaching policies and strategies. Teachers' professional development, especially at the primary level will go a long way in stabilizing the education sector, for the strengthening of other levels of education and the society at large. Little wonder why Ajani (2018) encouraged the Nigerian government and stakeholders in the

education sector to facilitate the planned and regular professional development programmes for practicing teachers.

A continuous professional development should be the hallmark of the teaching profession. The reason for this is not far-fetched, as the process and the requirement of the profession is herculean; these teachers have to: prepare and plan for their daily classes and teaching tasks, instruct learners, manage their classes and learners while they learn, assess and evaluate learners and become a model for them to emulation. Teacher professional development is a facilitated learning opportunities where teachers learning and relearning is achieved; such as seminars, workshops, symposiums and conferences. Bartram and Walton (2002) defined teacher professional development as the steady and continuing re-energizing of a teacher's practice in teaching whilst he or she is on the job. Its main purpose is to provide long-term positive change in what is and what should be in the classroom situation. In the same vein, Mohammed (2006), restated that teachers' professional development has two key phases: teachers' preliminary training and continuous professional development.

Professional development programmes generate teachers' teaching and learning consciousness, equip teachers with current and vital information on teaching and learning experiences and how teaching and learning resources can be maximized in facilitating classroom learning and learners' academic outcomes. It provides teachers with varieties of teaching experiences, teaching skills, avenues for academic qualifications and learning environments. As asserted by Ajani (2018), a germane and purposeful professional development of teachers does promote effective instructional tasks delivery, which invariably result in improved learners' performance. Professional development for practicing teachers is one of the pillars of quality education. Through it, teachers are equipped with the current and relevant skills, experiences and knowledge to fully deliver in their profession as well as ensuring learners' general academic performance. This was also supported by Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Yoon (2001), that in-service professional development for teachers help them learn faster and better, and enhances their interactive skills, within and outside the profession.

In as much as the teaching profession is demanding, teachers are expected to groom learners who are responsive, skillful and would eventually become a force for economic growth and development; teachers are to be subjected to a robust and continuous in-service professional development programmes that can augment their skills, values, knowledge and attitudes necessary for an all-round optimal outputs in their teaching duties. According to Hirsh (2005), the three characteristics of teachers' effective professional development are: a thorough understanding of a given subject content; teachers understanding and acceptance of the training designs and learning experiences and a post-evaluation of professional development programmes to determine the impacts of such programme on the teaching-learning processes.

Professional development of teachers especially in Nigeria should begin with: evaluating teachers in order to recognize areas needing professional development/training; identifying experienced facilitators; only teachers with challenges in teaching should be slated for the professional development programmes; teachers from within a subject areas converging to brainstorm on general challenges or issues as well as the practical solutions to them; the ideal professional development should advance attainment of knowledge and skills in teachers' subject areas; feedback of subject-cluster experiences of the teachers after the professional training. The feedback obtained will foretell if the teacher had to go through the process again (Ajani, 2018).

The strategies that could be adopted for in-service professional development for teachers include seminars, conferences and workshops (Lee, 2005). According to him, professional training programmes for teacher should go beyond days or weeks as this will entail profound and practical learning that can improve teachers' subjects' knowledge and skills. The brainstorming sessions of the training provide teachers the opportunity to learn professionally and be able to create and use effective teaching ideas (Dymoke & Harrison, 2007). More so, professional development and training for teachers allow them the opportunity to work and interact with experienced professionals in and outside their subject areas (Robinson & Carrington, 2002).

Similarly, the American Federation of Teachers (1995), outlined the principles for professional development to include: ensuring depth of content knowledge; providing a strong foundation in the pedagogy of particular disciplines; providing more general knowledge about teaching and learning processes, and about schools and institutions; reflecting the best available research; contributing to measurable achievements in student learning; expecting teachers to be intellectually engaged with ideas and resources and providing sufficient time, support and resources to enable teachers to master new content and pedagogy and integrate these into their practice. When these principles are followed to the latter, teachers content knowledge and competence in teaching, may be enhanced.

The teacher content knowledge of English Language is paramount in ensuring that learners especially at the primary level of education; imbibe the very art, skill and knowledge of English language as a subject which in Nigeria is core to their future learning pursuits. No wonder Maduekwe (2007) in a study on the strategies for teaching English lessons in Lagos, Nigeria; observed that a large numbers of teachers with a good teaching qualifications, do not possess the adequate knowledge of some grammatical concepts and they ended up imparting the wrong knowledge to learners. This situation could cause a serious gap in the teaching – learning processes and may constitute threats to the attainment of quality assurance in the Nigerian schools. This portrays the reason why teachers of primary schools be professionally trained and retrained; as it is an element necessary for their professional competence.

Professional competence is having a full grasp and understanding of the teaching and learning materials, concepts and the structure of a language (English language in this case). The competencies of English language teachers includes their having adequate knowledge of the language facets such as: linguistics, discourse, sociolinguistic, and

strategic. They should also master the spoken and written, receptive and productive in all aspects of the language. Teaching Competencies are most times related with highly professional performance which invariably correlates with pupil performance. It is the cognitive structure that facilitates specified behaviours and the ability to deal with multifaceted and impulsive situations (Westera, 2001). Aligned with the introduction of foreign languages to learners, the need to train teachers has risen (Vojtova, 2008). There is a need for professional development and training programmes for teachers of English language especially at primary schools.

Various studies have revealed the importance and positive impact of teachers' continuous professional development and training on teachers' teaching competences and performance: Cherubini, Zambelli and Boscolo, 2002; Ermeling, 2010; Frey and Fisher, 2009; Levine and Marcus, 2010; Morais, Neves and Alfonso, 2005; Seymour and Osana, 2003; Ponte, Ax, Beijaard, and Wubbels, 2004; Osiesi and Adeyemo, 2019; Mohammed, David, Mohammad and Ansia (2011). Although, Atsua and Abdullahi (2015) reported the contrary. As sterling as these studies are, they did not consider the impact of teachers' professional development and training on primary school English teachers; this is the crux of this study.

### Statement of the Problem

English Language is vital in developing communication and social skills in learners. It could empower learners to compete favorably with their peers around the world. For these learners to be grounded in the subject, teachers teaching the subject should also be grounded and knowledgeable enough to deliver. Primary school learners seem to be underperforming and lacking the needed zeal in some segments of the subject especially "phonetics". It is hoped that for teachers to be efficient and effective in teaching the subject (professionally competent), they should undergo professional development/training programmes at one point of their teaching profession or the other. Thus, this study sought to ascertain English teachers teaching professional competence in the teaching and learning of English Language in Nigerian primary schools *vis à vis* the need for professional development and training programmes.

### Research Questions

1. What is the relationship in the professional competence of teachers during and after their exposure to professional development and training programmes?
2. To what extent did the teachers possess the necessary professional competence after their exposure to professional development and training programmes?

### Methodology

This study is an ex-post factor approach of the survey design. This is because the researcher did not manipulate any of the independent variables as they have already occurred. A random sampling technique was used to select twenty primary schools in Oyo state, Nigeria, with 168 English teachers who were currently undergoing the SUBEB/UBEC teacher professional development programme, 2018; was randomly selected to serve as sample for the study. Two instruments: Teacher Teaching Competence Scale (TTCS) with Cronbach's Alpha Test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.68 placed on a 4-point Likert scale of Very Competent, Competent, Somewhat Competent and Not Competent consisted of 22-Items, measuring teachers' competence in teaching. The second instrument was the Teachers Checklist Observation Scale (TCOS) with Scott Pi reliability coefficient of 0.71 placed on a 4-point Likert scale of Very Competent, Competent, Somewhat Competent and Not Competent. It consisted of 12-Items that measured teachers' competence while teaching. A co-teacher in the same classroom with the sampled teacher was given this instrument to rate the teacher while teaching while a research assistant would also rate simultaneously. The TCOS was given to these co-teachers both during and at the expiration of the training. The researcher pleaded with these co-teachers, not to inform the sampled teachers of the rating process. The Instrument was shown to three colleagues for the purpose of perusal and validation (in terms of face and content). The suggestions and correction made were effected on the instruments before it was used for data collection. The data collection lasted for a period of fourteen weeks. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation.

### Results

**Research Question 1:** What is the relationship in the professional competence of teachers during and after their exposure to professional development and training programmes?

**Table 1:** The relationship in the professional competence of teachers during and after their exposure to professional development and training programmes

Correlations		Observation During	Observation After
Observation During	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1	.822** .000
Observation After	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.822** .000	1

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 reveals the relationship in the professional competence of teachers during and after their exposure to professional development and training programmes. As showcased in the table, there is a significant high positive

relationship in the professional competences of teachers, during and after their attending and exposure to a professional development and training programmes. It can be inferred therefore that teachers attendance and exposure to a professional development and training programme; does enhance their professional teaching competences.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent did the teachers possess the necessary professional competence after their exposure to professional development and training programmes?

**Table 2:** Extent to which teachers possesses the necessary professional competence after their exposure to professional development and training programmes

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1.	The textbook(s) for the subject was/were useful	3.66	0.63	CP
2.	The content of the subject was valuable	3.55	0.68	CP
3.	The content was adequate	3.24	0.98	CP
4.	The teacher was concerned with whether the students learned the material	2.91	1.34	CP
5.	The teacher treated students in a considerate manner	2.96	1.23	CP
6.	The teacher rendered after- school- hour assistance on the subject	2.33	1.49	NCP
7.	Students felt free to ask any subject related question from the teacher	2.83	1.44	CP
8.	Student felt free to ask personal questions that bothered them form the teacher	2.63	1.47	CP
9	The teacher could recognize students' difficulties in understanding new material	2.95	1.28	CP
10.	Teacher have a sense of humour	2.34	1.55	NCP
11.	Teacher show enthusiasm for the subject mastery	2.82	1.44	CP
12	Teacher welcome questions	3.18	1.13	CP
13.	Teacher welcome comments from students	2.80	1.47	CP
14.	Teacher understands students learning difficulties	2.89	1.36	CP
15.	Teacher explain new concepts with clarity	3.19	1.20	CP
16.	Teacher come to class well prepared	3.28	1.08	CP
17	Teacher present the learning material in a logical and well arranged order	2.97	1.28	CP
18	Teacher do a good job of answering students' questions	2.89	1.24	CP
19.	Teacher show willingness to re-explain material which the class did not understand	2.67	1.43	CP
20.	Teacher make clear what is expected of the students in the lesson	3.04	1.19	CP

21.	Teacher use chalkboard/other board well while presenting lesson	3.07	1.15	CP
22.	Teacher use audiovisual materials to effectively contribute to students' understanding of new lesson	1.69	1.54	NCP
<b>Weighted Average</b>		<b>2.91</b>		

**\*CP = Competent, NCP = Not Competent**

Table 2 presents the extent to which teachers possess the necessary professional competence after their exposure to professional development and training programmes. Based on the value of the weighted average (2.91 out of 4.00 maximum value obtainable), which is more than the 2.50 the study accepts as a value that represents as large extent of professional competence, it can be inferred thus, that teachers; as a result of their been professional trained, possesses large degree of professional teaching competence. However, much work is to be done in empowering teachers on the use audiovisual materials to effectively contribute to students' understanding of new lesson, encouraging them in rendering after- school- hour assistance for students on the subject and to have a great deal of sense of humour while teaching.

**Discussion**

Arising from the finding of the study, it is clear that teachers' attendance and exposure to a professional development and training programme; does enhance their professional teaching competences. This finding therefore has upheld the positions of Cherubini, Zambelli, and Boscolo, 2002; Ermeling, 2010; Frey and Fisher, 2009; Levine and Marcus, 2010; Morais, Neves and Alfonso, 2005; Seymour and Osana, 2003; that professional development and training programmes causes changes in cognition, beliefs and practice; improves curricular knowledge and understanding in areas as diverse as reading comprehension and science, as well as fostering of student motivation. It also supported the findings of Ponte, Ax, Beijaard, and Wubbels, 2004; which posited that professional development for teachers brings about Improvement in their ideological, empirical and technical knowledge. Additionally, this study revealed that teachers who have been professional trained, possesses large degree of professional teaching competence. This finding throws more light to those of Osiesi and Adeyemo (2019) which re-echoed that professional development and training programmes for primary school teachers transforms and improves their quality and classroom Interaction Patterns. Similarly, it also supported the findings of Muhammad et al (2011) which showed that positive changes occurred among teachers who gained more in-service pedagogical courses.

Nonetheless, the finding does contradict the findings of Atsua and Abdullahi (2015) which stated that teachers' professional development programmes have no significant impact on their teaching competency needs.

**Conclusion**

The findings of the study necessitated the conclusion that professional development and training programmes for English teachers at the primary level of education is a prerequisite for the maintenance and sustenance of input and output quality from both teachers and learners alike; since teachers' professional development does foster teachers' professional competences in the teaching of English language as well as the subsequent improvement of the learning outcomes of learners.

**Recommendations**

Hence, it is recommended that for professional development of teachers to continue over time, stakeholders in the education sector; especially governmental agencies should sponsor and encourage teachers to attend and actively participate in professional development and training programmes. Incentives should also be given to these attendee teachers. This will go a long way in ensuring that teachers look forward to attending such training and development programmes in the future.

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